



# Hikaru Dorodango

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## PARTS:

- [Dirt \(1\)](#)
- [Water \(1\)](#)
- [Bucket \(1\)](#)  
*or containers for your dirt and mud.*
- [Screen \(1\)](#)  
*or sifter if you do not have dirt of a fine particulate.*
- [Plastic bags \(1\)](#)
- [Soft cloth \(1\)](#)

## SUMMARY

Everyone enjoyed playing in the mud as a child, right? Well, that's what you get to do with *hikaru dorodango* ("shining mud ball" in Japanese). Except this time, you don't just wash the mud off and forget about it. Instead, you create something beautiful and unique. You also form a surprisingly strong attachment to a piece of artwork that you create from something so mundane.

Professor Fumio Kayo of the Kyoto University of Education has created an easy method that even children can follow. He used dorodango to study children's developmental psychology, and found that children would become attached to their mud and put tremendous effort into shaping and polishing their dorodango. The phenomenon was first made famous in Japan back in 2001. I hope you too will enjoy this wonderful pastime.

**Note: The finished dorodango pictured here were done by Bruce Gardner. Finished dorodango photos by Amelia Milazzo.**

## Step 1 — Make your mud.



- Take some dirt — any dirt will do for this first step. You may want to pick a certain kind of dirt for its texture or color; this creates a very different final product. Choose dirt with the least amount of rocks and twigs in it.
- Get your dirt, a bucket, and a little water. Mix them together until you create mud about the consistency of dough.

## Step 2 — Form your core.



- Take a handful of mud and begin shaping it into a sphere. Jostle and roll the mud back and forth to bring water to the surface. Roll and gently shake your dorodango while shaping it.
- You need a smooth, round core to begin your dorodango. Shoot for 4" in diameter; larger makes it more difficult to manage. If there are any protrusions or depressions, fix them, or they will affect the final shape of your dorodango. I used adobe for my first dorodango and it formed a sphere very easily.
- Add more dirt as needed to help absorb some of the moisture. Your sphere should become sticky to the touch, like paste.

### Step 3 — Form your first layer.



- Take a handful of fine dirt and sprinkle it over the sphere's surface. Continue to shape your sphere as you rub fine dirt into the surface; this helps to pull moisture out of the top layer.
- While rubbing the dirt in, I use the curvature at the base of my thumb to brush off excess dust, rolling the ball with the left hand, shaping it with the right. Don't rub so much that you remove the added dirt or top layer already there. Continue this process to dry out the surface.
- Now it becomes harder to fix depressions and protrusions. I accidentally hit my dorodango against my bucket, and my final sphere had a 1" line in the surface that I just couldn't get rid of.
- Proceed to the next step once your sphere is dry and firm enough to retain its shape. If the surface begins to crack, you can add a bit of water to the surface to help smooth it back out.



## Step 4 — Create your dorodango sauna.



- Put your dorodango in a plastic bag. Lay it on a soft surface such as a folded towel. Leave your sphere in the plastic bag for about half an hour — enough time for moisture to condense on the surface of the sphere and the bag. This step draws out some of the moisture still in the sphere.
- Remove the ball from the bag and repeat, drying out the surface of the ball again. Then replace it in the bag for another “sweat.” Do this about ten times, until it feels right. Each time you repeat it takes longer for moisture to condense on the sphere’s surface.
- Tip: Hasten by using your refrigerator, but be careful not to over-chill — it could ruin your dorodango, turning the bottom of it back into mud. For the first few sweats in the fridge, 20–30 minutes is enough. After the third or fourth sweat you can up the time to 1–2 hours. If you need an extended break, bag your sphere and store it in a cool, dry area on a soft surface.



## Step 5 — Dust your dorodango.



- For this step, you need a finer particulate of dirt. To see if your dirt is fine enough, pat it gently. If your hand has a fine layer of dust on it, you're good to go. If not, keep sifting to create finer dirt. Pat your dirt to get a fine layer of dust on your hand. Apply this dust all over your sphere's surface. Use the thumb-and-index-finger technique to remove excess dirt. Gently rub dust into the sphere's surface until it becomes dry.
- The sphere's surface should now feel dry and dusty. Place it in a new plastic bag, so you don't get any excess water, and leave it for a longer sweat; try it in the fridge overnight.
- Continue this process until you've removed all moisture from the sphere's surface. You can tell you've achieved this once dust no longer sticks to the sphere's surface. Afterward, place your sphere in a new bag for one final sweat.

## Step 6 — Make it shine.



- Remove your sphere from the bag, add another layer of dust, and gently rub it into the surface to get rid of the moisture. I grabbed my bucket of fine dirt and watched a movie while rubbing more and more dust into the surface before polishing my dorodango for the first time.
- Now grab a nice soft cloth and proceed to very gently polish your sphere. If this creates scratches or marks on the surface, your sphere is still too wet. Repeat the sauna process. If after polishing for 10–20 minutes it looks fine, you may polish with more force.
- I had to polish my sphere for over an hour until it shone. But the next day, it lost some of its luster because it still had moisture that had surfaced overnight. I repeated this step and ended up with a beautiful hikaru dorodango. And it has retained its luster. I am now addicted to making dorodango. Every chance I get, I teach friends and family how to make them.

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